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California Governor Proposes \$7 Billion Investment in Public Broadband.

California Governor Gavin Newsom has laid out his plans for what to do with the state's surplus and federal recovery funds, which includes \$7 billion over three years to build out broadband infrastructure. If the state legislature approves the May revision budget proposal, California will get to work on one of the [biggest public broadband](#) fiber network projects in the US.

"[Universal] access to high-speed Internet is critical to the state's economy, education, and basic health and well-being, and will be a key component of the state's long-term recovery," the [budget](#) reads. "The pandemic has underscored the importance of making broadband accessible and affordable for educational, employment, and health purposes."

According to the budget, 83.4 percent of residents are using broadband but just over 52 percent are able to obtain speeds of 100 Mbps. It notes that 51.3 percent of rural households don't have access to 100 Mbps service and nor do 28.4 percent of homes on tribal lands. The problem persists even in urban areas. Around half of the households lacking access to 100 Mbps broadband are located in those parts of the state.

The budget lays out a plan to build a "middle-mile" network, effectively a highway and main road broadband infrastructure. Providers have said that it's cost prohibitive to connect some parts of the state to broadband networks, especially in rural areas. As such, California plans to create a \$500 million Loan Loss Reserve Account to help non-profits, local governments and tribes to obtain private financing for municipal fiber networks (or the "local road" part of the infrastructure). Newsom also hopes to provide other incentives for providers to connect unserved or underserved households to the network.

Along with expanding the infrastructure, a key goal is to make high-speed broadband access more affordable for Californians. Newsom wrote on Twitter that the state "will be closing the digital divide."

It'll be several years before this network is fully up and running (assuming it's approved). Those who have been struggling with iffy connections while working at home or remote schooling during the pandemic won't benefit from this plan immediately. Still, upgraded public broadband infrastructure will improve internet access for millions of Californians in the long run and, according to the proposal, it will "create tens of thousands of quality jobs to help the state's economy recover from the pandemic."

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by Kris Holt – Contributing Writer

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